

VZCZCXRO9378
PP RUEHAG RUEHROV
DE RUEHCV #1384/01 1921619
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 111619Z JUL 07
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9226
INFO RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY
RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 0881
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CARACAS 001384

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/11/2027

TAGS: [MARR](#) [PROV](#) [PREL](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: THE MILITARY MOVES FURTHER RED

REF: A. CARACAS 782

[1](#)B. CARACAS 732

[1](#)C. CARACAS 505

[1](#)D. CARACAS 424

[1](#)E. CARACAS 071

CARACAS 00001384 001.3 OF 002

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT R. DOWNES FOR 1.4 (D)

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) The July 6 replacement of Defense Minister Raul Isaias Baduel with Gustavo Rangel Briceno does not bode well for the future of the Venezuelan Armed Forces (FAN). Baduel, a long-time supporter of Chavez, was perhaps the last remaining cabinet member to make even mild statements contradicting Chavez' policies, particularly Chavez' efforts to further politicize the military. This follows the dismissal of Presidential adviser Army General Alberto Muller Rojas who, while asserting that party politics was nothing new in the Venezuelan military, became too public in his disagreements with Baduel, and to a lesser extent with Chavez, harming Chavez' image. Rangel, on the other hand, is in line with Chavez' more politically radical appointments, such as Foreign Minister Maduro and Vice President Jorge Rodriguez. All three appear to unquestioningly and enthusiastically support Chavez' policies. Rangel also appears to be the driving force for implementing, under Chavez' direction, the reserve forces, which Chavez created to partially counterbalance the traditional armed forces. Baduel's dismissal, particularly in such a low key manner, was due to politics and loyalty and not, as some have said, because of the nude photos of Baduel that had recently appeared on the internet. End Summary.

Chavez Focuses on Military

[1](#)2. (C) Chavez focused additional attention in recent days on the FAN, partially to offset disquiet initiated by his introduction of the oath "Patria, Socialismo or Muerte!" (my country, socialism or death) into military daily life, and partially do to public disagreements among his senior military advisers. On June 24, the 186th anniversary of the Battle of Carabobo, he announced a 30 percent pay raise for military personnel, including retirees. Traditionally the Venezuelan military are shuffled around Venezuelan Independence Day on July 5th, although perhaps less so in

recent years, when promotions and retirements are announced. This year the President announced over 3,300 military promotions, explicitly tying their promotions to their commitment to and fervor for the revolution.

Baduel Dismissed

13. (C) Late on July 6, during a military graduation ceremony, in a rather low key manner, and oddly on Baduel's birthday, President Chavez announced the replacement of Defense Minister General Raul Baduel with the commander of the reserves, General Gustavo Rangel Briceno. While the traditional time of the year for such a move, the manner was unusually low-key and caught many by surprise. For example, Baduel's elevation to Minister was signaled at the anniversary of Carabobo in 2006 and then announced July 5, 2006. In this case the announcement was made late on Friday night after the normal news cycle, perhaps to minimize any potential negative reaction. There was no prior indication that Rangel would move up at this time, in fact the rumor was that Baduel would be carried over at least until the end of the year. In press interviews in the days after the announcement, both Baduel and Rangel indicated they were surprised by the announcement, with Rangel saying he had expected to head the reserves for another two years.

14. (C) Raul Isaias Baduel was a long time supporter of Chavez. Born in 1955 in Guarico, Baduel was one of four co-founders of the Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200 and supported Chavez in his 1992 coup attempt. Eleventh in his military academy class (1976), Baduel was also commander of the parachute brigade in April 2002 that was instrumental in returning Chavez to power. Unlike his predecessor, Baduel at times spoke out at odds with the president's statements. Baduel and Chavez publicly disagreed over the politicization of the military during the Fall 2006 Presidential campaign.

CARACAS 00001384 002.3 OF 002

When Chavez said the FAN was rojo-rojito (red-red) like the state-owned energy company PdVSA, implying it embraced the revolution, Baduel publicly differed noting the Venezuelan constitution called for it to defend the country but to be politically neutral. Following Chavez' institution of the new military oath, Baduel also raised mild public concerns with this approach.

Agreement Not Enough

15. (C) Baduel's replacement follows the dismissal of Army General Alberto Muller Rojas, a strong supporter of Chavez, who was called out of retirement in 2006 to advise the military. He frequently appeared on government television providing ideological support for Chavez. Muller Rojas was dismissed on the June 24 Carabobo anniversary following an interview with pro-government newspaper Ultimas Noticias. In this and other statements he implied party politics were nothing new in the Venezuelan FAN. He also too publicly disagreed with Baduel on policy matters, including over announcements of possible purchases of Russian submarines. (He also differed publicly with Chavez on the method and content of the submarine announcement, but not on the wisdom of the purchase.) Muller Rojas was criticized by the opposition for his involvement while an active duty officer, in the organization of PSUV, Chavez' United Socialist Party of Venezuela. (Comment: Muller Rojas' public statements, at odds with Baduel created unnecessary public controversy. Chavez, under criticism for the closure of RCTV and internal dissension over the creation of PSUV, apparently decided he needed less public discussion on the military side. He chose therefore to remove Muller Rojas and replace Baduel with someone who would unquestioningly and less vocally follow his directions. End comment.)

Loyalty First

16. (C) New Minister of Defense Gustavo Reyes Rangel Briceno

was born in Maracaibo on August 16, 1955 and finished seventh in his military academy class (1978), where he studied mechanical engineering. He served as commander of the Fourth Army Division from September 2004 until 2005 when he became Army Inspector General. In August 2006 he was named head of the Reserve and Mobilization Command. In this capacity he became the driving force, under Chavez' guidance, behind the creation and expansion of the reserves.

¶7. (C) Comment - While some are trying to link the retirement of Baduel to nude (and apparently authentic) pictures of the former Minister that hackers posted on government and other internet websites in recent weeks, it instead reflects Chavez' continued efforts to consolidate his control and stifle even the mildest discussion of his policies. While Baduel's criticism of Chavez was measured, Chavez does not tolerate dissidence in any form. Rojas Muller on the other hand brought additional attention to policy measures and made public internal disagreements putting Chavez in an unfavorable light. Rangel is more akin to other recent Chavez appointments, such as Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro and Vice President Jorge Rodriguez, both of whose predecessors at times disagreed publicly with Chavez and both of whom are unequivocal Chavez supporters. The appointment also does not bode well for the FAN, which now will be lead by a strong supporter of (although no longer director for) expanding the reserves as both a counterbalance to and competitor for resources for the FAN.

FRENCH